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ABSTRACT

In response to the increasing proportion of foreign graduate students in master's programs for teachers of English as a second language (MATESL), students in the University of Northern Iowa's program were surveyed concerning the appropriateness of the programs' design. In in-depth interviews and on questionnaires, foreign graduate students were asked which courses are most applicable to their home teaching situation, what courses should be added, whether the program fulfills original expectations, how the differences in the educational system make the program easier or more difficult, and what changes might make the program more relevant to student needs. Overall, little need for program improvement was found. Based on the results, specific recommendations were made for revision and use of the questionnaire, continuing the survey among other such programs, surveying graduates in the field, and expanding the study to include native speakers. The questionnaire is appended. (MSE)

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MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE FOREIGN MATESL STUDENT

Cheryl Roberts
Carolyn L. Shields

Presented at the 22nd Annual TESOL Convention
8-13 March 1988, Chicago, Illinois

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Most of the MATESL programs set up at U.S. universities in the 60's and 70's were designed for native speakers who wanted to teach English overseas or in intensive programs in the U.S. (Larsen-Freeman, 1983). While there were some non-native speakers in these programs, they were in the minority and often, little or no attention was paid to their particular needs and situations. Now, however, the balance of students in these programs has shifted and in many places, the non-native speakers outnumber the native speakers. Yet there has been little or no change in most programs in response to this shift. This paper focuses on how well the traditional MATESL curriculum meets the needs of these foreign students, and more specifically, how well the program at the University of Northern Iowa meets those needs, as identified through a questionnaire and in-depth interviews.

In determining a framework for language teacher education, H. H. Stern (1983, 351) proposes two incontrovertible components--"an academic (or substantive) part and a professional training part." (351) The Professional Standards Guidelines issued by TESOL (1982) state that a quality program is based on certain basic principles and goals (further laid out in the Guidelines). These Guidelines also say " A quality program of professional preparation for teachers of English to speakers of other languages systematically and periodically reviews its goals, objectives, resources and operations to determine its strengths or weaknesses." (163)

In seeking to provide the most appropriate principles and goals, program developers must consider various factors in choosing a model to use and to implement as well as a way to evaluate and revise the program. This can be thought of as meeting the needs of a program. Bellon and Handler (1982) define educational needs "as the differences between actual and desired performance" (31). An important part of the process must be needs assessment.

One form of needs assessment of TESOL programs is described in Richard Day's (1984) presentation of a survey questionnaire distributed to graduates of the MA program at the University of Hawaii. This questionnaire focused on graduate careers for teachers and others after they had completed their MA programs. Another source of information about needs can be made by

surveying the courses offered at various MA programs in the US and Canada (pp 1-159) using the Directory of Professional Preparation Programs in TESOL in the US (160-163). In addition, the professional standards guidelines listed in the directory can be examined, as well as the "Guidelines for certification of and preparation of Teachers..." (164-168). Some of the goals and options in these programs are summarized by H.H. Stern (352):

a) linguistic needs (academic component)
   proficiency in the target language
   conceptual knowledge about the language
   experience and skill in the target culture
   conceptual knowledge of the culture

b) language education needs (professional training component)
   education orientation
   language teaching theory
   general personal education
   practical teaching experience

Within these general guidelines, it is possible to look more closely at specific programs.

Description of Program

The program at UNI is historically a fairly old program, having been created in the early 60's as one of the emphases possible in an English liberal arts program. Sincee there was no certification of ESL or Bilingual Ed in the state of Iowa, this program was geared toward graduate students. If any goals were articulated, they could be summarized as: to train Americans to teach English to foreigners (EFL), especially to train native speakers of English to teach in Hawaii and in foreign countries.

By the mid 70's, these goals had become more specific; that is, the MA program was intended for three different types of students:

> a) native speakers of English who already had experience teaching EFL or wanted to travel to get that experience (such as peace corps volunteers); b) non-native speakers, most of whom were already teaching, who wished to get professional degrees in their teaching area; and c) a very small group of people who wished to get certified in other states to teach ESL.

Needs for the program of the 70's were perceived as having to duplicate the training received by the teacher educators on staff. All had taught overseas, had majored in something other than TESOL and had come back to major in linguistics or applied linguists; very few had had any real training in education. Basically, the program was geared for the a) type of student. In the 80's, the program began to shift to the b) type student; and new TESOL staff members entered with more technical training than before.

Currently, there is a growing awareness of the need for certification in ESL and the program has begun to shift to meet this need. At the same time, there has been a major shift in the student population. There are now many foreign or international students in both the BA and the MA programs, and most of them are on scholarship, with the specific intention of getting a degree in teaching English so that they can return to their own countries to repay their scholarships by teaching in their school systems.

The program today has 57 MA students and five full-time staff members. It is part of an English department and thus there are curriculum responsibilities outside the TESOL program. It is a 32-hour major, theoretically completable in one year, though it is recommended that the foreign students take two years, primarily because of adjustment to the culture and educational system of the U.S. and to components of the program, such as comprehensive exams and a long research paper, both of which require some academic preparation. Course sequencing is flexible, but it is recommended that students take an introductory course and theory courses, followed by applied courses, and finally, the practicum.

THE STUDY

Goals

The original motivation for this study came from a feeling of dissatisfaction that the students had needs that were not being met. This, in turn, arose from an awareness that while the student-clients had changed considerably over the past ten years, the program had remained essentially the same. The desire to identify just what the students' needs were led us to design a format for finding out.

Instruments

The format chosen for this study consisted of two parts: a questionnaire through which to obtain both descriptive data about the students and quantifiable responses about their perceived needs and attitudes, and an oral interview in which responses to specific questions could be be probed and comments on questions they felt should have been asked could be invited.

The questionnaire (see Appendix) was five pages long, and except for the first two questions, could be answered by circling a response or by listing previous courses/experiences. It focused on two areas: the students' expectations before coming to the U.S. or the program at UNI, and their attitudes with respect to how the program would meet their future teaching needs. The first two short-essay type questions were asked in order to elicit, before students were influenced by later questions, what they expected they would need to do in order to be trained as English teachers, and in order to discover what previous experiences or studies had helped them when they entered our program.

Questions about their expectations particularly focused on the kinds of courses they expected to take: theoretical linguistics, applied linguistics, electives, literature. Also asked were questions about their expectations for life in the U.S. and adjustments to the American university system, particularly at the graduate level. The next section of the questionnaire asked them to rate the quality and quantity of courses in the above areas, to rate the sequencing of the courses, and to rate the relevancy of the courses and other aspects of the program to their future teaching situations. Finally, they were asked if they had found their expectations of living and adjusting to the educational system to be accurate.

During the interview, then, we probed specific responses, requested amplification and encouraged any other comments or suggestions of how to meet their needs better.

Procedure

Questionnaires were distributed to our approximately 25 international graduate students in the fall of 1987 along with a sign-up sheet for interviewing. They were asked to fill out the questionnaire and then bring it with them to the interview, which lasted from fifteen to thirty minutes. The first question that was asked in the interview was that the student

attempt to describe his/her future teaching situation as well as possible, including the age and number of students, native language, reasons for and goals of studying English, approach and materials most likely to be used, and so on. The interviewer then asked if there were questions that were difficult to answer; if so, which and why. We then went through the questionnaire, asking the respondents to clarify or amplify various responses. Finally, we asked if there were any other remarks the student wanted to make and if there were any suggestions s/he could offer that would make the program more pertinent to his/her future teaching situation. The interviews were tape recorded.

Finally, the data from the questionnaires was assembled and the tapes were listened to for anecdotal evidence, final suggestions, and general comments. The results will be discussed in the next section.

RESULTS

Description of students

The total number of students who completed both the questionnaire and the interview was 16. Most were between the ages of 20 and 29 and most were female. Although the majority of the students reported their native language as Malay, we also had speakers of Chinese, Spanish, Arabic, Tamil, and Tswana. All had, of course, a Bachelor's degree or its equivalent; a fairly large number had earned their B.A. at a U.S. university (this made it difficult for some of the students to remember what their expectations of, for example, the American educational system, had been). Most of the B.A. degrees were in "English" and Linguistics, with others in Literature and two in TESOL. The students had been at UNI for varying lengths of time, anywhere from one semester completed to more than six semesters, but most were in their second year. Half the respondents had had some previous training in teaching English, through workshops and seminars, through previous Linguistics classes, or through obtaining a B.A. in a related field. About a fourth of the respondents reported having previously taken TESOL-related classes.

Previous teaching experience differed dramatically. One group, about 40% of the students, reported between 3 and 17 years of previous treaching experience; the rest had had either no experience or only tutoring experiences. Finally, the vast majority of the respondents reported that they would be teaching in high schools or universities upon their return.

Expectations

The first question we asked related to what students had expected would be necessary in order to train as English teachers. Their answers seemed to reflect their current views rather than previous expectations, for example, instead of responses such as having to study literature or becoming highly proficient in English, there were responses such as being interested in teaching and being able to balance time. In the next section, classes they expected to find, about 70% said they had expected about the same number of theory courses as they found, and 63% reported the same for the applied courses. Most had expected the number of electives they found. Less than half reported finding the number of Literature classes expected, while 37% had expected fewer (this is interesting because no literature classes are required for the MATESL degree, though they may be taken as electives).

Most of the respondents expected adjusting to life in the U.S. (same section) to be either fairly easy or only somewhat difficult, but a larger number expected the adjustment to the educational system (number and type of tests, writing papers, using the library, informality in the classroom, teacher expectations) to be either somewhat difficult or very difficult.

Findings

In terms of living arrangements, as with expectations, most of the students found the adjustment to be fairly easy or only somewhat difficult. A few comments were received from those who were more accustomed to British English that American English took a little time to get used to, and several reported having had to take a semester of Intensive English before beginning regular classes. The orientation program at UNI is under the auspices of the admissions office, and so the TESOL staff have little to do with it. However, student reports that the program is weak are causing us to consider how we might get involved. Specific suggestions included setting up a buddy system for the first semester, and having a counselor (not just an advisor) available to deal specifically with foreign students.

Adjusting to the educational system elicited more varied responses: about a third found it fairly easy, about half circled that it was somewhat difficult, and the remainder found it very difficult, particulary the informality in the classroom and teacher expectations. Several of the Malaysian students mentioned the difficulty they had of being expected to

participate in class discussions when they are primarily used to being silent in the classroom. One suggested that teachers not base any part of the grade on participation, at least in the first semester, because of the emotional stress involved. A further suggestion was that teachers be more sensitive to the religious needs and practices of the students, and respond tolerantly when those needs come into conflict with the educational system. We have made an effort to schedule classes flexibly, but of course major institutions are necessarily structured.

Feeling that adjusting to new living and studying arrangements was properly another study of its own, we focused on the number and quality of courses in the MATESL program (Table 1). The majority of the respondents rated the theory courses as only adequate; the applied courses were rated adequate and excellent about equally; and other courses (which include primarily theoretical seminars) were rated by a third of the students as excellent, by the rest as adequate. The respondents commented that it is difficult to rate a group of classes, albeit small, because of the differences in teachers' styles, course topics, texts, and so on.

Table 1: Students' ratings of quality of courses in MATESL program.

	excellent	adequate	poor
Theory	25%	63%	6%
Applied	44%	50%	
Electives	31%	56%	

A number of comments were received in this area about the Practicum. Although there is a small Intensive Program at UNI, the administrators of the program prefer that our foreign students not teach in it. We often set up an optional, additional class to which the Intensive students are invited, but this has some obvious drawbacks, and we include tutoring and microteaching in the Practicum although neither can be considered typical of teaching in general and certainly not typical of the teaching most of the MATESL students expect to be doing in the future. As Richards' and Crooke's 1987 study shows, UNI is not unique in having difficulty in designing an appropriate practicum. Suggestions were received that may be useful in this regard--that we seek spouses and/or children of foreign students in other departments of the university, particularly those from

the same country as the students, to make up a class, though small, that will in some way be representative of the kinds of students that our graduates will see in the future. A couple of respondents said they had expected to practice teach to the extent that undergraduates do in certification programs and that any teaching experience, even if the students and situations are totally different, would be beneficial. ESL certification in the state of Iowa becomes available fall, 1988, but this is intended for undergraduates. This problem area needs further exploration.

In terms of the number of courses required, both in this section of the questionnaire and during the interviews, an overwhelming number of students felt there should be fewer theory courses and more applied courses. Students who had studied Linguistics in their UG degree particularly mentioned that repeating the same or similar material was not helpful in terms of their future teaching situation. Indeed, most respondents stated that theory courses were useful for training teachers but would not be directly applicable for teaching the kind of students they expected to have; hence, "a little goes a long way". They added that several of our applied courses, for example the TESOL Methods course and Problems in English Grammar, should become two-semester courses, perhaps as TESOL I and TESOL II, and should encompass opportunities to apply the material in the course in microteaching or tutoring situations. Also, several respondents felt there should be more time for electives, and that a variety be offered more often, which is somewhat difficult because of the small staff and the high demand for some of the service courses we offer. Specifically, some of the classes suggested were ESP, Curriculum Development, Planning, Teaching Reading/Writing, Educational Psychology, Literature, Public Speaking, an additional Sociolinguistics class, and Materials Development. Finally, most felt that the sequencing of the courses was either somewhat or very appropriate, though a general comment was received that theory courses be taken later in the program and applied courses earlier. Another comment was received that courses with both undergraduate and graduate students were not as rigorous, in spite of requiring more of the graduate students, and that these courses should perhaps be separated. Again, the combination is necessary due to the limited staff size.

In terms of the relevance of various aspects of the program to the students' future teaching situations, most felt that the theory courses were relevant or very relevant (Table 2). Fully 80% rated the applied courses as very

relevant while the remainder rated them relevant. Other courses, including electives, were rated by the majority as only relevant. The long research paper required at the end of the program was seen as relevant or very relevant, mostly because of the skills required to complete it rather than the content information acquired, but a third of the respondents felt the comprehensive exams were irrelevant, feeling that the skills involved would not be invoked in the future. The other two-thirds, however, mentioned that they felt the experience of integrating varied aspects of knowledge would serve them well, though not necessarily in a highly specfic way. Many, however, commented that they felt the format ought to be changed, a possibility that the staff is currently considering. Finally, over half the respondents waxed enthusiastic about the Introduction to Graduate Studies class, currently a two unit introduction to research, bibliography and style sheet formats, and so on, and felt that it should be expanded to three units. This course was originally developed in response to weaknesses perceived among the students entering the program, and is a good example of how a program can respond in a timely and efficient manner.

Table 2: Students' ratings of relevance of program to future teaching situation.

	very	relevant	irrelevant
Theory courses	31%	50%	19%
Applied courses	81%	19%	
Electives	25%	69%	6%
Research paper	44%	44%	13%
Comprehensive exams	19%	50%	31%
Intro to Grad Studies	56%	25%	19%

Various suggestions were received as to ways to increase the relevancy of the program to future teaching needs of students. For example, several respondents mentioned the possiblity of having the English department request information and materials from the Ministry of Education in Malaysia and other countries so that students could design projects and/or write papers using those materials. Another student remarked that there was little interaction among students of different cultures and that there sould be some sort of forum with required attendance so that students would share their experiences, problems, needs, ideas and so on with each

other. Others felt that more overt contrastive analysis of English with the students' native languages would be very helpful to them. Finally, an excellent suggestion was received that we keep in touch with our graduates to inform them of new offerings so that if possible, they could return for refresher courses at some time in the future.

Limitations

The responses to both the questionnaire and the interview questions were not particularly surprising. This may be because, in retrospect, the goals of the study were less well-defined than they might have been. It is also possible that some of the students were inhibited about giving honest opinions. In addition, the students may simply not have devoted much thought to the questions we raised. Overall, there was little of substance said, which may suggest that the program is meeting students' needs. However, we feel we need to go further. With this in mind, we have several recommendations to make, some relating to the results obtained from this study, others relating to future studies and to the process of future studies.

Recommendations

1. Clarify goals of questionnaire and possible future actions. Without clearly stated objectives, we cannot evaluate results, and hence cannot respond appropriately. Questionnaire instruments and procedures for goal setting in other fields should be investigated.

2. Further revise questionnaire. Fewer sections should be focused on in greater depth and detail. Information should be gathered on specific topics, not just classes, and specific activities and techniques, not just overall philosophy and approach. Attempts to gather global information about theory classes, for example, asking respondents to rate them for adequacy and relevancy, precluded discovering relevant in what ways? inadequate how?

3. Continue the survey among U.S. TESL programs. As the questionnaire is refined, we would like to extend the study to other TEFL/TESL programs, not just in the U.S., but for ESL Teacher Education in other English-speaking countries.

4. Send the revised questionnaire to previous graduates now in the field, who, due to their knowledge of our program and their subsequent experiences teaching in their own countries, are valuable sources of information regarding the relevancy of various aspects of our program.

5. Expand the study to include native speakers in the MATESL program. The types of native speakers now entering the program are also changing--there are more young, inexperienced students who are seeking certification. Thus, we need to devise a format or procedure for charting their changing needs and goals as well.

Finally, we want to keep in mind throughout that while focusing on student needs, there are also staff needs, program needs and institutional needs that must be taken into account.

In conclusion, the study has shown the value not only of evaluating programs in order to continue to meet changing needs and clients, but also of discovering the most appropriate processes for doing so. This study is currently being developed further on both accounts.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire

I. Before coming to the United States, you had certain ideas about what you might find and what you might have to do. Please think back and try to remember what those ideas were, and then answer the following two questions.

A. What did you think would be necessary in order to be trained as an English teacher ? (living in the U.S.? taking classes--what kind, how many? and so on).

B. What previous areas of study helped you when you entered the MA program at UNI?

II. Background Information

Please circle the most appropriate response.

Sex: M F

Age: under 20 20-29 30-39 over 39

Semesters completed at UNI (including summers):

1 2 3 4 5 6 more than 6

Native language _____

Highest degree earned _____ where _____ in what _____

Previous training in English:

Previous training in the teaching of English (included workshops, conferences, short courses):

Previous experience teaching English:

III. Expectations

A. Please answer the following questions about what you expected before you came to UNI.

Number of courses in:

Theoretical linguistics (syntax and structure, phonology, semantics):

fewer about what expected more

Applied linguistics (TESOL, Problems, SLA, Testing Practicum):

fewer about what expected more

Electives (Bilingual, Computer-Assisted Language Learning, Language Planning, and so on):

fewer about what expected more

Literature:

fewer about what expected more

B. Did you expect living in the U.S. to be a) fairly easy, b) somewhat difficult , or c) fairly difficult to adjust to, in terms of:

the living arrangements (dorm, apartment)	a	b	c
working and studying with Americans	a	b	c
culture shock	a	b	c
the food	a	b	c
the educational system:			
number and style of tests	a	b	c
writing papers	a	b	c
using the library	a	b	c
informality in the classroom	a	b	c
teacher expectations of students	a	b	c

III. UNI MATESL PROGRAM

A. Please rate the following courses in terms of quality (not the instructors, but the content of the courses):

Theory courses (Syntax and Structure, Phonology, Semantics):

excellent adequate poor

Applied courses (TESOL, Problems in English Grammar, Second Langauge Acquisition, Testing):

excellent adequate poor

Other courses (Bilingual, Computer-Assisted Language Learning, Language Planning, Practicum):

excellent adequate poor

B. Is the number of courses required appropriate?

Theory courses:

very somewhat not at all

Applied courses:

very somewhat not at all

Other courses:

very somewhat not at all

C. Are there too many or too few?

Theory courses:	too many	appropriate	too few
Applied courses:	too many	appropriate	too few
Other courses:	too many	appropriate	too few

D. Is the sequencing, or ordering, or courses appropriate?

very somewhat not at all

E. Did you find that it was a) easier, b) about as you expected, or c) more difficult to adjust to:

the living arrangements (dorm, apartment)	a	b	c
working and studying with Americans	a	b	c
culture shock	a	b	c
the food	a	b	c
the educational system:			
number and style of tests	a	b	c
writing papers	a	b	c
using the library	a	b	c
informality in the classroom	a	b	c
teacher expectations of students	a	b	c

F. How relevant will the following be to your future teaching situation?

Theory courses:	very relevant	relevant	irrelevant
Applied courses:	very relevant	relevant	irrelevant
Other courses:	very relevant	relevant	irrelevant
Research paper	very relevant	relevant	irrelevant
Comprehensive exams	very relevant	relevant	irrelevant
Introduction to Grad Study	very relevant	relevant	irrelevant